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 CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY Poland

 SUBJECT Conditions in Gniezno: Religious Attitudes/Living
 Standard of Living/Entertainment Facilities/Political Attitudes
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Religious Attitudes

2. "Gniezno is the residence of the Polish Primate, Cardinal Wyszynski. It has the most ancient cathedral of the country. Most of its inhabitants are people who have retired from active work. Life flows quietly there in the shadow of the cathedral and the city's glorious past. The town has about 27,000 inhabitants; its population has increased by only a few thousand since World War II. The newcomers are Poles from east of Bug River, from the area which has been incorporated in the USSR. The German inhabitants of Gniezno and its environs have been repatriated to Germany, and all the German schools have disappeared.
3. "At first glance everything in Gniezno seems to be exactly as before World War II, but actually there have been great changes. The war itself left no traces as the battles passed the city by. The cathedral was burned down during Poland's liberation. The Soviets had already moved past Gniezno and taken Poznan when some important Germans who were administering Gniezno sought refuge on the tower of the cathedral where the Germans had an anti-aircraft observation post. The Soviets entered the town without battle. Two days later the Germans began taking pot shots at the Soviets from the top of the tower. In reprisal the latter concentrated guns on the tower from all three sides of the market place and shelled the tower heavily. The Bazylika Swietego Wojciecha took fire and burned for two whole days. The roof caved in and most of the interior was destroyed, including the beautiful stained glass windows. The local people were horrified and will never forgive the Soviets for this, just as they will never forgive the Germans for turning the cathedral into a concert hall. The Germans took away the tomb of St Wojciech and destroyed the sculptures representing his martyrdom. Only the main cathedral altar has remained untouched.

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4. "Money was collected to restore the cathedral. The iron construction for the tower was ordered from Sweden and a provisional roof built. Most of the cathedral is now restored. As soon as the provisional roof was ready divine services were resumed in the cathedral. Along with the eight other churches in Gniezno it is today a centre of moral resistance to the Soviets and to Communism. All the churches are overcrowded on Sundays and holidays. The people of Gniezno have always been very religious and have always stuck to all national and religious traditions. Today they manifest this attitude more than ever before. The state gave no money for the restoration of the cathedral. All the funds were collected by the parish itself and by collections in other churches.
5. "The Germans also removed from Gniezno the monument of Boleslaw Chrobry, the Polish king whose capital was Gniezno. In its place is a fountain. The regime has not restored the monument.
6. "The Primate, Cardinal Wyszinski, is greatly venerated by the entire population of Gniezno. His prestige is enormous. His careful attitude which aims to strengthen the morale of the population while avoiding everything that might provoke the authorities to reprisals against the Church and the faithful is considered wise and is approved. However, the Primate is seldom at the Kuria Biskupia on Ulica Tynska Gniezno. Most of his time is spent in Warsaw.
7. "Once a year, on April 23, Gniezno has its great day, the Indulgence (odpuszt) of St Wojciech. This religious holiday has a much greater importance in the life of the city than any national day. Even now it is celebrated by the entire population of Gniezno, the province, and pilgrims from all over the country. The travel difficulties created by the regime and the prohibitive cost of railway tickets have reduced the number of pilgrims. But even in 1953 Gniezno had a great religious procession on April 23. The authorities did not attempt to interfere.

Living Standards

8. [REDACTED]
9. "Railway employees have one privilege: they get 50 tons of coal per year at regular prices. The other classes of the population suffer terribly from cold in winter and have to pay 100 zl per ton of coal on the black market. Railway workers are also entitled to 12 railway tickets yearly. Their wives get six tickets, and small children may travel free of charge with their parents.
10. "Railway employees belong, however, to the worst-paid category of workers in Poland. It is no wonder that their opposition to the regime is strong. A cashier in the Gniezno office, who pays the salaries of the employees, belongs to Pay Group 8. This means that his salary is 420 zl plus a monthly premium of 300 zl. The lowest pay group is 12, which is not more than 300 zl per month plus a small premium.
11. "Seamen have little idea of the misery of the people. One day near the end of the month in winter 1952-53 I saw the railroad cashier besieged by railwaymen and their wives to lend them some money; they had nothing left to buy food for their children. The whole salary of these people goes to pay the rent and buy food. They never have anything left over for clothes. If the family is large, the children small and the mother unable to work outside the home, the wages of the father do not suffice even for food. At the end of the month they are obliged to borrow to buy bread.
12. "My father's whole salary is spent entirely on the household. It is not always enough. The family consists of three persons. I used to send 500 zl of my seaman's earnings home every month in addition to parcels of goods brought from abroad. The family used all this money to keep the household running.
13. "My father wore the same suit for nine years. It was turned and patched and turned again. In 1953 I brought him a new one from Sweden. Clothes and shoes are most expensive in Poland, and people are forced to buy the cheapest they can get. The so-called 'first quality suiting' contains only 60 percent of wool; the rest is some sort of cellulose.

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The people call such material 'jodelki' (jodla- fir tree) and say that it may sprout into needles any moment. The following joke circulates about this kind of textile: One woman says to another 'My husband is a hundred-per-cent man.' 'What do you mean?' asks the other. 'His trousers are 40 per cent and his coat 60 per cent' (wool).

14. "The regime gives substantial promotion to young Communists. Most of the older Communist officials have moved westward to better jobs. In Gniezno quite young boys are taking their places. Only very young men now work in the personnel section of the railway; practically all of them are CP members. They are ousting the older men who are not Communists, although these men have knowledge and experience.

Entertainment Facilities

15. "Gniezno has two cinemas. Only Soviet, Polish and Czech films are shown there and most of them are political. Whenever a comedy or a non-political film is shown, even if it is a Soviet film, the cinema is full. The political films are not liked.
16. "The theatre still plays classical plays. In winter 1952 I attended a performance of 'Madame Butterfly' by the Poznan Opera at Gniezno. A good ticket cost 15 zl; a medium-priced ticket 8 zl.
17. "Gniezno has only two dance restaurants: the Spoldzielnia Gastronomia (formerly Hotel Francuski) and Kawiarnia Esplanada. Decent people sometimes go to the Esplanada in the afternoons to drink a cup of coffee in silence or carry on a whispering conversation with a friend. All the restaurants are closely watched by secret UB agents. In the evenings high officials, black market traders, agents and prostitutes are their only clients. Besides, respectable citizens do not have the money to go to such places.

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19. "We slept on straw on the floor. The morning reveille was at 6 am and the curfew at 6 pm. The food was 500 grams of bread in the morning and some substitute coffee without either sugar or milk, a vegetable soup for lunch and porridge in the evening. There was never any meat. Once a week we were permitted to take a 15 minute walk in the prison yard. During this walk we had to hold our hands behind our backs, walk in a circle and exchange no words. It was even prohibited to laugh or make a sign. Before going to the yard we were lined up in the passage with our faces to the wall and had to wait until our turn to step into the yard was called. If anyone acted against the regulations, he was sent to the isolation cell (karcer) for 12-24 hours. It was permitted to smoke between reveille and curfew in the cells but not during the walk. At 6 pm an inspector walked past the cells and everybody had to stand to attention and shout: 'Good evening, citizen!' After 16 days I got out through influential friends.
20. "After this I avoided the restaurants in my home town. Indeed, all young people avoid them. They have no money and hence spend their free time at home with friends, listening often to foreign broadcasts. The foreign radio broadcasts are the only exciting things left in the dreary life in Poland today. My family has a 5-valve Telefunken set.

Political Attitudes

21. "In a small town like Gniezno everybody knows everybody else, and agents have a hard job to find out anything. As soon as they appear anywhere they are spotted, and everybody disappears. The overwhelming majority of Gniezno's inhabitants, especially the prewar ones, are strongly anti-communist. They sympathize with the West and the US. They hope that a war will break out soon and bring liberation. Nobody believes that the Soviets might be prevailed upon to withdraw peacefully. I cannot name any UB agents in Gniezno as I was there only a few days at a time. I do know that everybody knows them."

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